

Technology in Music Education and the Jazz Education Network National Conference

The TI:ME and JEN conference was held on January 4-8 of 2012 in Louisville, KY. This conference provided an opportunity for me to explore the latest trends in Jazz Education and specifically the use of technology in Jazz Education.

The dominant discussion and inservice within the conference was with regards to the use of software for the tablet computer in the music classroom. The tablet has been embraced because of its portability and its relatively inexpensive software. The value with music educators has been the portability. One device can replace many individual tools and still be used within the context of a performing ensemble rehearsal. In modern music rehearsals we have embraced a number of tools to enhance learning within the rehearsal. These include recording devices, metronomes, electronic tuners, music dictionaries, audio playback devices (CDs/MP3s), and ear training devices. These examples of technology have become a standard part of our daily rehearsals. The excitement that surrounds the tablet computer is that all of these devices that were large, cumbersome, and expensive parts of our lessons can now be included in a single device with a few applications.

The advances in the capabilities and software for the iPad and iPod led the discussions at the conference. Early versions of the iPod and iPod applications were limited by the capabilities of the device and the quality of the software. The last year has brought an explosion of software that has embraced the audio quality and processing speed of the latest versions of the iPad and iPod.

Within my band, orchestra, and jazz ensemble rehearsals, I have started to embrace the use of these devices in my classroom. Until this year, iPods and cell phones were prohibited in our classrooms. The fundamental change I have made includes a set of five iPods that are provided daily to various members of the group. I am also encouraging the students who own smartphones (iPhone and android) to bring them into the rehearsal. Each device includes an electronic tuner to facilitate the tuning of the individual instruments, a metronome to help with tempo and pulse, reference materials regarding instrument fingerings, terminology, music symbols, recording software to facilitate recording the ensembles and individuals and jazz improvisation, and accompaniment tools that replace the “music minus one” recordings of the past.

Although the use of tools to do each of these things is not new to the music classroom, the inclusion of them in one inexpensive and portable device is a huge advance forward. Ethical and motivational questions still need to be solved. The software and hardware will still need to be refined for more specific uses. In addition, we as music educators will need to find ways to positively use the devices without bringing the negative aspects into our classroom (texting). I also am working to make sure the use of the devices is driven by educational objectives. I want the students to embrace the learning enhanced by the use of the device, rather than dwelling on flash and fun of the device itself.

Fall 2011